

Jesus Among the Publicans

When Jesus left Jezrael, He journeyed awhile toward the east, then went around the mountain which lay between Jezrael and Nazareth and, about two hours from the former place, reached a number of houses standing in rows on either side of the highroad. They were occupied by publicans. Some poor Jews dwelt under tents at a little distance from the road. That road, along which the dwellings of the publicans stood, was fenced in by wickerwork, the entrance at either end being closed. Rich publicans lived here who rented many tolls in the country and again leased the same to under-collectors. Matthew was one of these latter tax gatherers, but belonging to another place. Mary, the niece of Elizabeth, once dwelt here, I think. Having become a widow, she went to Nazareth and afterward to Capharnaum. She was the same that was present at the Blessed Virgin's death. The commercial highroad to Egypt from Syria, Arabia, and Sidon passed through this place. Great bales of white silk in bundles like flax were brought this way on camels and asses; also fine woolen stuffs both white and colored; great, heavy, woven strips of carpet; and lastly spices. When the camels arrived in this district, the gates were closed and the merchants had to unpack their goods, which were carefully examined. They had to pay a tax, partly in merchandise, and partly in money. The latter was mostly three-or four-cornered yellow, white, or reddish pieces, on which was stamped a figure, raised on one side and hollow on the other. They gave also coins different from these. I saw on those coins little towers, a virgin, also an infant in a little ship. Little bars of gold, such as were offered by the Kings at the Crib, I never saw again excepting with some strangers who came to John the Baptist.



The publicans were all leagued together. When one received more than his fellows, he divided with the rest. They were wealthy and lived well. Their homes were surrounded by courtyards, gardens, and walls, reminding me of those of our well-to-do peasants. They lived entirely among themselves, for others would not associate with them. They had a school of their own and a teacher.

Jesus was well received by them, His followers also. I saw several women arrive here; I think Peter's wife was among them. One of them spoke with

Jesus, and they soon went away. Perhaps they were either coming from or going to Nazareth, and were executing some commission for the Mother of God. Jesus stayed first with one, then with another of the publicans, and taught in their school. He especially pointed out to them the fact that they often extorted from travelers more toll than was just. They became very much confused, and could not divine how He knew that. They were more humble than the other Jews, and took His words better. Jesus urged them to receive baptism.